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ON *King Lear*

In your June issue (pp. 346-347), Mr. W. F. Tambllyn shows that Burgundy of *King Lear* is an insertion by Shakespeare in the old story and argues that by Burgundy Shakespeare meant the king of Spain. This interpretation fits well into the historical events of the time, for France and Spain were the candidates for the hand of Princess Elizabeth as France and Burgundy are for that of Cordelia. Immediately after the accession of King James, Rosny, the French ambassador, proposed a marriage between Elizabeth and the Dauphin of France, a proposal that was supposed at the time to have met with high favor from King James.¹ On the other hand, James was trying to dicker off Prince Henry and Princess Elizabeth to the King of Spain and the catholic interests, among other things, for the acknowledged headship of the English church.² It is to be remembered in this connection that in part of these negotiations Shakespeare himself played the part of an idle uniform.³ Also, part of the Gunpowder Plot in 1605 was to marry Princess Elizabeth to some Catholic gentleman and thus retain control of the government.⁴ Thus the marriage of Princess Elizabeth was a live issue 1603-6, within which period *Lear* was written, and the contestants were France and Spain, parti-protestant and catholic.

It seems then that Mr. Tambllyn has here unearthed a pretty little hint from William Shakespeare to King James, officially delivered Dec. 26, 1606. The hint is doubly interesting as indicating Shakespeare's own reaction on this important question. We are not justified, it is true, in supposing that Shakespeare was now all love for France, since the favorable conception of France in *Lear* is to be found also in the source, and the conception needed heightening for proper contrast; it may be merely not that Shakespeare disliked France less but that he disliked Spain more. Still I think one feels a little less of insular prejudice here against the French than in many of the earlier plays. Probably then, thanks to a broader experience and to some years of residence with the Frenchman Mountjoy, the wig maker of Silver Street, Shakespeare was now more appreciative of France. At any rate, we have here some indication that Shakespeare leaned to France rather than to Spain, with all that such leaning implies.

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¹Gardiner, *History of England 1603-1642*, I, 107; Aikin, *Memoirs of the Court of King James I*, I, 134.

²Gardiner, *History*, I and II; Aikin, *Memoirs*, I.

³Law, *Shakespeare as a Groom of the Chamber*.

⁴Gaylev, *Beaumont the Dramatist*, 52.